

## Time Management

*Good time management is essential to success at university. Planning your time allows you to spread your work over a session, avoid a 'traffic jam' of work, and cope with study stress.*

*Many deadlines for university work occur at the same time, and unless you plan ahead, you'll find it impossible to manage. To meet the demands of study you need to spread your workload over a session. Work out what needs to be done and when. Work out how to use your available time as efficiently as possible.*



### Plan Ahead and Prioritise

The first step to good time management is to prioritise your tasks. In other words, deciding which task is most important and should be completed first. For example, in a choice between reading for an essay due in *four* weeks or preparing a seminar presentation in *two* weeks, choose to prepare the presentation.

To prioritise successfully you must develop weekly and long term time management plans. Many students find long, medium and short term planning useful for organising their study as effectively as possible. *Planning ahead saves time, worry and energy.*

### Long - Term Planning

#### Using a Yearly Planner

A yearly planner you can place on your wall or by your desk allows you to plan your work over an entire session and helps to remind you about deadlines and upcoming commitments.

- Place the planner in a position where you have easy access to it.
- Write in the dates assignments are due and exams are scheduled.
- Work out how long you will need to complete each task. Allow yourself plenty of time.
- Remember to allow for extra workload. If you have several assignments due at the same time, you will need to begin each task even earlier than usual.
- Set start dates for each task. Write them on your planner.
- Draw lines back from the due dates to 'start' dates. Use different colour pens for different subjects, assignments or exams.

Doing this will give you a good indication of how much time you have to complete tasks and cue you to start them.

#### Tips to Make Time Management Easier

- Complete small tasks straight away rather than putting them off. This will encourage you to begin tackling larger tasks needing attention.
- Break difficult or 'boring' work into sections. This allows you to approach a large task as a series of manageable parts.
- Don't try to write a whole assignment in one sitting. Write it section by section.
- If you have 'writer's block', try writing something—anything—down. Even if you change it completely later, at least you've started. The alternative is having nothing at all.

Your study and the time you spend on it is up to you. If you find yourself losing direction, sit back and think of why you are doing your degree; remembering your goals can put everything into perspective.



# Planning on a Weekly Basis

## Use Time Slots Wisely

Students often believe they have 'no time' to study, but many of them think of study time in terms of 3 hours or more. While long time slots are necessary, medium and short time slots can be used just as effectively. A well-used 15 minutes is more effective than a wasted 2 hours. Different periods of time suit different activities. For example:

### Short Time Slots

One hour or less is useful for:

- reviewing lecture notes
- completing short readings
- previewing long readings
- doing problems
- revising for exams
- jotting down essay plans
- proofreading an assignment

### Medium Time Slots

One to three hours is a good time for more concentrated study.

Medium slots can be used for:

- more detailed note-reviewing
- reading for courses/ assignments
- taking notes from readings
- drafting/editing an assignment
- revising for exams

### Long Time Slots

More than three hours can be set aside for:

- working on an assignment
- completing an extensive amount of reading
- doing research for assignments
- revising for exams

*Bus and train journeys or lunch breaks are good times for this kind of work.*

*During medium and long time slots, divide study time up into one hour sections and take breaks. Try not to study for longer than an hour at a time, as concentration begins to slip.*

## Fill in a Weekly Planner

For weekly planning, use a diary, a timetable or a Learning Centre Weekly Study Schedule.

Fill in all the main demands on your time:

- Uni lectures and tutorials.
- Hours of work (if you have a part-time job).
- Any regular sport or leisure commitments.
- Mealtimes and regular family commitments.
- Sleep times.

When you have written in the main demands on your time, look at the blank time slots left. This will help you work out how many hours a week you actually have for study.

Next, plan time slots to use for uni-related work. Fill in times that could be used as study periods including short, medium and long time slots.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6-7 am		GYM	SHORT	SHORT	SHORT	SHORT	Sleep
7-8 am	SHORT		Tutorial	Lecture			Sleep
8-9 am	Lecture	SHORT			GYM	Work	Sleep
9-10 am		Lab					Sleep
10-11 am							
11-12 pm			MEDIUM	LUNCH			
12-1 pm	SHORT			Lab			
1-2 pm	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH		LONG		
2-3 pm	SHORT		Discussion Group			MEDIUM	LONG
3-4 pm	Tutorial	MEDIUM					
4-5 pm							
5-6 pm		Lecture	MEDIUM/	DINNER	DINNER	Party!!!	
6-7 pm	GYM		LONG	Work	Work	Let My	
7-8 pm	SHORT		DINNER			Hair	DINNER
8-9 pm	DINNER		MEDIUM/			Down!!!	
9-10 pm	Sleep	Dinner	LONG				
10-11 pm		Sleep					
11-12 pm			Sleep				Sleep

## Be Flexible

Some weeks will be busier than others, and unforeseen things can happen. Remember that a timetable is only a plan or a guide. You don't have to follow it religiously every week, but try to stick to your plan as best you can. If you plan a study time slot and miss it, don't panic—look at the schedule and rearrange your time.

## Be Realistic

A great deal of time management is really about taking responsibility for your learning. The best plan is to be aware of how much time you have and to manage it effectively. Be realistic about your time and what you can do with it.

### Over commitment

Before you undertake study, you need to realistically assess all the demands on your time. Consider paid employment, family duties, sport, leisure or civic commitments. Good time management will not help if you are

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overcommitted. If you study full time, spend more than about 12 hours per week in paid employment and spend every evening at the gym, you will not have much time left to study. If you suspect you might have taken on too much, reassess your commitments, prioritise and compromise.

Be realistic about the amount of time an assignment will take you to complete. Different tasks require different amounts of preparation time. For example, you might only need a few hours to prepare for a tutorial, but writing an assignment will take significantly longer. You can't produce good, well-written work unless you give yourself enough time to think, research and write. Brilliant assignments are not written the night before, so start them in good time.

## Seeking Help

It's easy to procrastinate when you experience difficulties with an assignment, but putting off starting only means you will have less time to work on it. If you miss an assignment deadline, you will lose marks. So, if you think you need some assistance, ask for it. Remember, good time management includes good self-management. Talk to your tutor about difficult assignments, or visit services like The Learning Centre or The Counselling service. Don't put off seeking advice—the longer you wait, the more anxious you'll feel.

## Common Time 'Thieves'

### Problem:

Feeling so overwhelmed and anxious about your workload that you 'freeze', put things off and don't get anything done.

### Solution:

1. Set priorities.
2. Get started.

Actually starting a task reduces your anxiety about it. List all the tasks you have to do in order of importance and urgency, and work through them one at a time.



### Problem:

Procrastination: spending time on irrelevant tasks when you know you should be studying.

### Solution:

1. Set study goals and vary your study techniques.
2. Make a 'to do' list.

The problems mentioned above are classic 'delaying' tactics to put off starting work. Start a task that is giving you anxiety—don't put it off! Even if you just jot down a plan about how you will proceed further, at least you've made a start!

Make a list of what you have to do in order of priority. For example, if an assignment is due in 1 week, then it goes to the top of your 'to do' list. Be conscious of what you're doing. If working on an assignment is at the top of your list and you catch yourself just popping out to wash the car—stop yourself and ask: "Why am I doing this now? I'll do it after I've reached my study goal".

### Problem:

Putting off starting a task because it feels so overwhelming or difficult that you can't face it.

### Solution:

Break up the workload into small chunks.

This is a very effective strategy. Break up work into as many small, achievable tasks as you can. Then when you sit down to study, you are not facing a huge, daunting pile of work, but one small task.

Complete a 'chunk' every study period. It might be a task or a period of revision. Take a break after completing a 'chunk'. If it's something you've really been dreading, reward yourself when you've done it!



### Problem:

Daydreaming or 'drifting off'.

### Solution:

Check your energy level and concentration.

Take a short break or a little exercise every hour. Open a window and walk around. If you drift off, try visualising a red stop light. Hold that image for a few seconds—then switch to a green light and go back to work.



### Problem:

Feeling that you can't begin because you won't be able to produce a 'perfect' result.

### Solution:

Aim at reasonable results!

Rather than aiming for a masterpiece each time, it's better to produce something—and pass—than to put it off for so long that you produce nothing at all.

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**Problem:**

The 'Too Hard' Basket: deciding that "I didn't want to do this course / study / unit anyway!"

**Solution:**

1. Re-examine your motives for studying.
2. Ask for advice.
2. Use the 'balance sheet method'.

Students do change their minds about their studies. They may feel they have taken the wrong path, or that their talents lie elsewhere. However, changing courses should be rational decision, not a reaction made out of frustration because the work is 'too hard'.

Discuss difficulties with your tutor or lecturer. Seek support from student services like The Learning Centre. Ask advice from the Counselling Service and

The Careers Service. Don't just throw in the towel! Before making any changes, be sure about what it is you really want.

Try the balance sheet method:

- On a piece of paper, write down all the benefits to getting item X done.
- On the other side of the page, write down all the reasons you can't get it done or have been putting it off.

This activity can help you to define exactly what has been stopping you working. It's likely you'll have a list of benefits (starting with "relief that the task is finished!") and a few reasons (such as "I really don't understand this assignment") you can then challenge yourself to sort out.

## What Students Do . . .

Some of the following comments from university students at the end of their first year discuss issues of study and time that might sound familiar (Field, Gilchrist & Gray, 1989). The comments are about two areas: planning ahead without getting obsessed about it, and developing effective habits for dealing with worry and stress.

### Trying to plan ahead without going overboard:

*"Compared to school, it's not that the work is harder, it's just that it's more detailed and therefore more time-consuming . . ."*

*"Instead of procrastinating, start thinking about the assignment right away so that you're the first one to get to the books. Most importantly, if you get a good start on an assignment you allow yourself enough time to deal with any unexpected problems . . ."*

### Developing effective habits for dealing with worry and stress:

*"Having some fun or relaxation on the weekend gives me enough strength to regain my sanity to start another week . . ."*

*"Even though I'm not finding everything awful or the workload too great, I get anxious sometimes. Last week, for example, I was sick and didn't get half as much done as I had planned. So I have more to do this week. I'm finding right now that I can't get all my reading done. So I just have to read what is most important, as I know I can't possibly read every single thing . . ."*

### Further Readings

Covey, S. 1990, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Simon & Shuster, New York.

Field, D. Gilchrist, G. & Gray, N. 1989, First Year University: A Survival Guide. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

MacQueen, C. 1998, Getting Ahead in Tertiary Study: A Practical Guide for Business, Social Science and Arts Students, UNSW Press, Sydney.

Northedge, A. 1990, The Good Study Guide, The Open University, Milton Keynes.